DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 241 544 TM 830 762

AUTHOR Pritchard, Betty
TITLE Evaluation: A Proposal for Purpose and Use.
PUB DATE [83]
NOTE 11p.
PUB TYPE Viewpoints (120)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Change Strategies; Evaluation Methods; Evaluation Needs; *Evaluation Utilization; Evaluators; *Formative Evaluation; Program Administration; *Program Evaluation

ABSTRACT

This paper proposes a humanistic approach that may not be evaluation as commonly regarded, but it does have a much greater chance to enact program improvement. It assumes that program developers and directors really want their activities to be effective and relevant. The role of the evaluator is that of facilitator, that of a linking pin to transfer understanding rather than accountability, and that of a teacher and resource of analytic expertise. The evaluator must relinquish the role of judge. The relationship between the evaluator and the practitioner needs to be one of active cooperation. In considering this approach, evaluators need to ask themselves which outcome is most important: is it preferable to have a report, to have particular actions taken, or is it enough to have a system of evaluation accepted that increases awareness and innovation? (BW)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED241544

Evaluation: A Proposal for Purpose and Use

Betty Pritchard
Director of Community Research
Macomb Community College

TM830762

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

B. Pritchard

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

- This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
- Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
- Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official NIE position or policy.

EVALUATION: A PROPOSAL FOR PURPOSE AND USE

Evaluation is undertaken for a variety of reasons, but the most espoused one is to instigate program improvement. The entire evaluation concept is centered around the provision of feedback as to the good and bad of an endeavor. The assumption is that such information leads to the implementation of changes to enhance effectiveness.

In fact, however, a considerable gap exists between the provision of information and the implementation of change. The lack of utilization of evaluation products is a common lament for evaluators. Recommendations are often ignored by decision makers and program planners. A variety of reasons contribute to this phenomenon. Most notably, the entire evaluation process is often feared or mistrusted by those involved in the program under scrutiny. Secondly, the information gathered may not be helpful in the political realities of the decision makers. Although evaluators are asked to determine value or worth, it may not be the best truth to pursue.

For in-house activities, where the evaluation report is not the goal and program improvement is, the process of evaluation can be far more beneficial than its completion. If the evaluator can set aside his or her own judgments and biases and become an information facilitator, the results of the effort may be more fruitful.

Imagine a scenerio where evaluation was not feared, but rather was viewed as an opportunity. What if it were seen as an avenue for the recognition of accomplishments more than of shortcomings? Could all the human defense barriers ever come down to the point where there was open communication about the origin of objectives, the constraints and disappointments of program implementation, and

TM 830 762

the hopes and aspirations that still exist? Is there any way that the process of evaluation could actually foster an organizational climate of trust? Would the science of evaluation really suffer if the evaluator worked within the framework of the practitioner's values? Suppose the main purpose was to supply information, options, and alternatives to the program, completely under the control of those more deeply involved, and to formally report only those positive elements and changes?

This paper proposes a humanistic approach that may not be evaluation as commonly regarded, but it does have a much greater chance to enact program improvement. It assumes that program developers and directors really want their activities to be effective and relevant. It describes the role of the evaluator as that of a facilitator, that of a linking pin to transfer understanding rather than accountability, and that of a teacher and resource of analytic expertise. Even though this approach is more akin to organizational development, it has signficant potential for increasing the acceptence and image of evaluation.

Definition of Program Evaluation

Historically, program evaluation as an educational activity has been a measurement function. Guba (1969) equates the early definitions with measurement, and Deniston (1980) suggests that it remains as measurement, but coupled with comparison to criteria or standards. Guba portrays evaluation as following "upon the heels of . . . the measurement movement" during the 1920's and 1930's (1969, p.31).

In more recent years, measurement against objectives has become a key concept in evaluation. Guba (1969) notes the work of Tyler and others and the results of the Ohio State Studies in re-defining evaluation as the determination of congruence between performance and objectives. Guba and Lincoln (1981)

specifically identify these objectives as behavioral objectives, saying:

> "Since educational objectives are essentially changes in human beings, that is, the objectives aimed at are to produce certain desirable changes in the behavior patterns of the students, then evaluation is the process for determining the degree to which these changes in behavior are actually taking place" (p. 4).

However, in determining the congruence between performance and objectives, at some point there enters a value judgment into evalution. Weiss (1972) contends that evaluation is "an elastic word that stretches to cover judgments of many kinds" (p. 1). Further evidence of the acceptance of value judgment into evaluation is provided in Guba and Lincoln's definition:

> "We define evaluation as a process for describing a value and judging its merit and worth. Merit and worth . . . are distinct aspects of value. Most evaluators agree that the complete act of evaluation involves both description and judgment, that is, it involves attaching value" (1981, p. 35).

Deniston (1980) suggests it is the evaluator's own preferences and values that identify the criterion or standard of measurement. Although Kilburg (1980) urges consideration of the values of all affected parties, seldom are evaluations conducted within the framework of the values of the practitioner.

Another approach to the definition of program evaluation centers around the process of providing relevant information. This is broader than measurement; probably closer to assessment since it refers to a process of gathering data and presenting it in an interpretable form (Barak, 1982). Delineating, obtaining, and providing information are seen as appropriate tasks of the evaluator (Stufflebeam et al, 1971, as cited in Guba , 1975). Cronbach (as cited in Woog and Zeigler, 1983) vaguely refers to program evaluation as a process by which society learns about itself, but narrows this somewhat by stating:

> "The proper function for evaluation is to speed up the learning process by communicating what might otherwise be overlooked or wrongly perceived" (Patton, 1983, p. 29).

Such educational approaches have the capacity to enact planned organizational

change, including program improvement. They do this not by decree, but through behavioral changes in people by first influencing values, attitudes, and organizational climate (Tushman, 1974). Thus the evaluator, in this role, becomes an educator.

Lack of Utilization

Justification for mulling over the definition of evaluation lies in what it does; and in what it doesn't do. As with so many of the social sciences, evaluation itself is still developing, being refined, and slowly gaining wider credibility. But there are still considerable gaps between the potential of evaluative efforts and actual accomplishments. Even though the rationale behind evaluation activities may be that of improving programs, the results are often ignored by decision makers. MacDonald (1981) labels evaluation as a classic example of an "ongoing zero utility activity" as he laments the executive downplay of evaluation results.

Factors to Increase Utilization

Leviton and Hughes (1981) reviewed research done on evaluation utilization and reported findings linking utilization to five clusters of variables: (1) relevance to the needs of potential users, (2) communication between end users and evaluators, (3) translation of evaluation results into their implications, (4) credibility or trust placed in evaluation, and (5) commitment or advocacy by individual users.

Leviton and Hughes point out that the information relevant to policy makers may not be for program managers. Those who deliver services are more interested in effectiveness of program elements rather than overall considerations. Guba (1969) supports this difference in information need among levels, proposing that evaluation approaches and techniques must vary to be appropriate to the purpose. Evaluation directed to many audiences may have utility for none.

If the goal is, in fact, to achieve program improvement, then the end user would be the practitioner - the one most able to implement change. The purpose of the evaluation would then be more clearly defined, and the whole process considerably less political. In this context, the evaluator and the practitioner can assist each other in identifying revisions to be made.

Direct and open communication becomes a critical element in this approach. Direct communication, without going through the hierarchy, is important to the practitioner, along with readable reports, explicit recommendations, and a preference for informal presentations of results (Leviton and Hughes, 1981). Stake (1977) proports that the process of evaluation can be a catalyst to improve communication within an organization. MacDonald (1981) suggests that close and continuous communication with the practitioner can transmit values and perspectives to the evaluator. Communication in the form of feedback and discussion of factual information leads to attitude change (Heller, 1970). Attitude change leads to behaviorial change, organizational change, and program improvement. E. M. Rogers said: "The adoption of an innovation is primarily the outcome of a learning or communication process" (Brown, 1981, p. 6). It is awareness and understanding of the array of interacting variables, attitudes, values and constraints that will ultimately make innovation recommendations relevant to the situation, and lead to change implementation.

If open communication is to take place, trust must be established (Wexley and Yukl, 1977). Trust and credibility of evaluation products are enhanced by corroborating information from other sources. These attributes also grow out of familiarity with evaluation processes and perceived expertise of the evaluator (Leviton and Hughes, 1981). Guba (1975) ties the credibility of results to the credibility of the evaluator, as well as to the sources of information. Guba (1969) also notes that differences in values account somewhat for estrangement

between the practitioner and the evaluator. Among multiple audiences, different value sets are likely to perceive the evaluation results as non-credible (Guba, 1975).

Anxiety is another human problem found in the evaluation process, along with fear, hostility, shame, and guilt. The blame for this has traditionally been placed on a misunderstanding of the elements and procedures of evaluation, and the ambiguities involved (Guba, 1969). Emotional reactions, however, may be more attributable to the situation of observation, scrutiny, judgment, and the threat of imposed change (Kilburg, 1980). In essence, clinical evaluation techniques have a dehumanizing and intimidating influence. Guba (1975) proposes that evaluation may in fact be dysfunctional to human performance. This is quite contrary to the climate of innovation and encouragement necessary to implement program changes.

Conclusion

This paper proposes an evaluation system oriented for the practitioner's use. Tadlock (1976) notes the secret of an effective evaluation system to be that of getting the best out of the most people - not to catch a few unproductive ones. It can be a vehicle of motivation and recognition rather than the threat evaluation currently connotes. This approach to evaluation is not so different in the type of data collected as much as in the assumption of roles of those involved.

The role of the evaluator is one of a teacher and information source. It is not to judge, but rather to bring insight to the situation. Elliot (1981) claims this can be done by providing a wider view through a multiplicity of angles and perspectives. As a conveyor of organized, systematic feedback, the evaluator can aid in the planning of change and innovation. It is only when evaluation is seen as a facilitating rather than limiting function that it can

be effective in program change (Atkin, 1977). Evaluation must be sensitive to the expectations and fears of those involved.

The role that the evaluator must relinquish is that of judge. There needs to be a recognition of the practitioner as the expert in his or her field. Deniston (1980) supports the appropriateness of the practitioner in the definition of objectives, identification of problems and innovation of program interventions. Taylor (1971) also advocates ground-level initiation of change. The evaluator must not stifle or control, but rather stimulate the dynamic development of programs (Guba, 1969).

The relationship between the evaluator and the practitioner needs to be one of active cooperation. If the evaluator can share the values and goals of the practitioner, a "win-win" strategy for change can be implemented. Such a relationship does not polarize power (Benne, Bennis, and Chin, 1976). It sets the tone for answerability through dialogue - a situation preferable to accountability (Elliott, 1981). The approach can supplant criticism with positive reinforcement. Change implemented through positive reinforcement "nudges good things onto the agenda instead of ripping things off the agenda" (Peters and Waterman, 1982 p. 69).

In considering this approach, evaluators need to ask themselves which outcome is most important in the situation. Is it preferrable to have a report, to have particular actions taken, or is it enough to have a system of evaluation accepted that increases awareness and innovation?

References

Atkin, M. Evaluation for content improvement. In D. Hamilton, B. MacDonald and C. King (Eds.), Beyond the numbers game: A reader in educational evaluation. Berkeley, CA: McCutchan Publishing Corp., 1977, 75-77.

Barak, R. Program review in higher education: Within and without. Boulder, Colorado: National Center for Higher Education Management Systems, 1982.

Benne, K., Bennis, W., & Chin, R. Planned change in America. In W. G. Bennis, K. D. Benne, R. Chin, & K. E. Corey (Eds.), The planning of change. New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1976.

Brown, L. Innovation diffusion: A new perspective. New York: Methuen, 1981.

Deniston, L. Whether evaluation - whether utilization. Evaluation and Program Planning, 1980, 3, 91-94.

Elliott, J. In search of an alternative power base. Education and Urban Society, 1981, 13(4), 507-529.

Guba, E. The failure of educational evaluation. Educational Technology, 1969, 9(5), 29-38.

Guba, E., & Lincoln, Y. Effective evaluation. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1981.

Guba, E. Problems in utilizing the results of evaluation. Journal of Research and Development in Education, 1975, 8(3), 42-54.

Heller, F. Group feed-back analysis as a change agent. Human Relations, 1970, 23(4), 319-333.

Kilburg, R. Metaphysics and professional resistance to program evaluation. Evaluation and Program Planning, 1980, 3, 185-190.

Leviton, L., & Hughes, E. Research on the utilization of evaluation: A review and synthesis. Evaluation Review, 1981, 5(4), 525-548.

MacDonald, B. Mandarins and lemons: The executive investment in program evaluation. Paper presented at AERA, Los Angeles, April 1981. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 204 385)

Patton, M. Book review: Designing evaluations of educational and social programs by Lee J. Cronbach. Evaluation News, 1983, 4(2), 29-33.

Peters, T., & Waterman, R., Jr. In search of excellence: Lessons from America's best-run companies. New York: Harper and Row, 1982.

Stake, R. Responsive evaluation. In D. Hamilton, B. MacDonald & C. King (Eds.), Beyond the numbers game: A reader in educational evaluation. Berkeley, CA: McCutchan Publishing Corp., 1977, 163-164.

Tadlock, M. Evaluation as a change mechanism - A management tool. Paper prepared for Tadlock Associates, Inc., Los Altos, CA, 1976.

Taylor, H. How to change colleges: Notes on radical reform. New York: Holt, Rinehard & Winston, 1971.

Tushman, M. Organizational change: An exploratory study and case history. Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University, 1974.

Weiss, C. Evaluation research: Methods of assessing program effectiveness. Englewood Cliff, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1972.

Wexley, K., & Yukl, G. Organizational behavior and personnel psychology. Homewood, IL: Richard D. Irwin, Inc., 1977.

Woog, P. & Zeigler, K. Comments: Evaluation as bearing witness. Evaluation News, 1983, 4(2), 78-81.